
Special Section:
Children's Rights: Contemporary Issues in Law and
Society (Part 3), edited by Maria Federica Moscati,
pages 125-141 & 203-223

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CURRICULUM AND ACTIVITY BOOK IN TÜRKIYE

NEJLA TUGCEM SAHIN BAYIK

Directorate of Basic Education, Ministry of National
Education of Türkiye

CEYDA DURMUS

Presidency of Strategy Development, Ministry of National
Education of Türkiye

Abstract

This research evaluates the representation of children's rights in the Early Childhood Education curriculum and Activity Book in Türkiye. Content analysis was used to assess the scope, depth, and frequency of children's rights-related learning achievements in both the curriculum and the Activity Book, revealing that these achievements do not explicitly emphasize children's rights in areas such as cognitive, language, and motor development. However, 11 out of 17 social-emotional development objectives and 116 activities indirectly addressed children's rights. The research suggests a need for the explicit inclusion of fundamental rights in the curriculum and the Activity Book, tailored to children's age, enhancing skills in conflict resolution, safety awareness, empathy, and opposition to rights violations.

Keywords: early childhood education; children's rights; human rights; content analysis.

[A] INTRODUCTION

The potential of early childhood education (ECE)¹ as a transformative agent in shaping future generations underlines the critical importance of exploring ECE's incorporation with children's rights, fostering a foundation for empathy, inclusion, and social responsibility. This article focuses on ECE, evaluating the representation of children's rights-related concepts in Türkiye's ECE curriculum and Activity Book (Ministry of National Education (MoNE) 2013a; 2013b).

The significance of early childhood as a formative period for cognitive, emotional, and social development has been acknowledged by distinguished theorists in psychology and education (Freud 1905; Erikson 1963; Piaget 1965; Bloom 1976; Vygotsky 1976; Bruner 1977; Bandura 1986; Piaget 2013). ECE, thus, can play an important role as a strategic juncture for the cultivation of foundational virtues such as tolerance and appreciation for diversity and fundamental human rights (Hawkins 2014; Quennerstedt 2016; Correia & Ors 2019). In this context, ECE is a crucial part of equipping young minds with a profound understanding of human rights values, while contributing to the holistic development of individuals within a broader societal framework (OHCHR 2004; OHCHR & UNESCO 2006; Council of Europe 2015).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC) recognizes children's rights, including the right to good quality education that nurtures their personality, talents, and mental abilities to the fullest potential (Articles 28 and 29). Introducing rights education in early childhood can contribute to creating a more just and harmonious society in which children are empowered to be active participants in shaping a world where the principles of equality, freedom, and dignity are at the centre (OHCHR & UNESCO 2006; Council of Europe 2015).

Despite the growing acknowledgment of the significance of children's rights education in ECE, there is a lack of research exploring its implementation and impact (UNICEF 2021). Existing efforts in the field of rights education have primarily focused on primary school-aged children, overlooking the crucial preschool years (Topsakal & Sadıkoğlu 2017). Therefore, this research focuses on examining the ECE curriculum and Activity Book in Türkiye through the perspective of children's rights to obtain a deeper understanding of how children's rights come into play in the ECE curriculum and Activity Book. The pivotal role of the

¹ ECE in Türkiye covers children aged from 0 to 5 and is not compulsory. However, ECE in Türkiye is compulsory for 3-5-year-olds with disabilities.

curriculum in rights education lies in its capacity to allocate dedicated “class time” within the structured and guided teaching and learning practice, ensuring that children have sufficient space to learn about rights (UNICEF 2014). Moreover, the curriculum serves as a guiding document for teachers, providing them with direction and flexibility in classroom activities. Additionally, in the context of Türkiye, the curriculum plays an influential role in the development of textbooks and activity books to be used in schools. Thus, it has the status of an educational tool with clear implications for many aspects of teaching practice.

The following research questions serve as a guide for the study. First, to what extent do the learning objectives in the ECE curriculum in Türkiye relate to children's rights? And, second, to what extent does the ECE Activity Book in Türkiye represent the learning objectives connected to children's rights?

To answer these questions, the study employed a qualitative research design. By assessing the existing ECE curricula of the Turkish education system, we aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the curricular approaches and Activity Book content related to children's rights based on the UNCRC in the ECE context.

In the subsequent sections of this article, we will present the literature on the role of children's rights in ECE in the international and national context, the present study's methodology, results, and discussion, bringing together the various aspects of the complex structure of rights education in early childhood. By doing so, we hope to enrich the ongoing discourse on promoting children's rights awareness and fostering a culture of respect and dignity right from the beginning of a child's educational journey.

[B] LITERATURE REVIEW

Children's rights education aims to foster a collective commitment to realizing and recognizing rights in communities and society, playing a crucial role in preventing rights abuses, promoting equality and sustainable development, and empowering people to participate in democratic decision-making (OHCHR & UNESCO 2006). Integration of children's rights in education encompasses a multifaceted approach involving educational practice, training, and various activities (Council of Europe 2015; UNICEF 2014), which may extend to shaping the curriculum content. Thus, the ECE curriculum can be viewed as one of the essential elements that can offer a framework for teaching people and communities about their rights at a very young age.

Within the context of rights education and curriculum design, a crucial aspect lies in understanding how children at a young age perceive their rights. Unfortunately, curriculum development often stems from an adult-centric perspective. However, to successfully integrate rights education into the curriculum, it becomes essential to prioritize the perspective of children. Understanding children's viewpoints is key to crafting an inclusive curriculum that resonates with their experiences. In this context, several studies have explored the comprehension of rights amongst young children (Ersoy 2011; Quennerstedt 2016; Uysal Bayrak & Ors 2020; Tunc & Pamuk 2023).

Building on the need to understand children's viewpoints, Ersoy (2011) aimed to explore children's (elementary school students) perceptions of rights and how these perceptions are potentially shaped by their socio-cultural environment within the context of Türkiye. Ersoy's findings (2011) revealed that students of lower and middle socio-economic status (SES) focused more on protection rights, while those from higher socio-economic backgrounds emphasized participation rights. Most of the participants in this study stated that they learn about their rights at school, with higher SES students also citing parental influence in learning about their rights. Ersoy's study underscores the role and importance of the curriculum and school in promoting equal access to rights education, while clearly highlighting disparities between SES groups in learning about rights.

In addition to Ersoy's (2011) insights, Quennerstedt (2016) conducted an observational study within a preschool setting, providing a perspective on how young children, aged from 1 to 3 years, engage with and embody human rights principles in their everyday activities. Within the children's actions, they found three distinct domains of rights, wherein children frequently engage with human rights principles and assume various roles as rights-holders: namely, the right to own something (such as a toy, a book, etc); the right to be respected and heard; and the right to equal treatment. Moreover, Tunc and Pamuk's (2023) research focused on children's perceptions of their rights. Their research was conducted with third-grade students in Türkiye. This research showed that some students emphasized that it was their right to participate in games as well as in education. Tunc and Pamuk's (2023) results highlighted the need for an extensive programme of rights education, and they suggested that it should be designed and implemented in accordance with children's particular needs within their own contexts.

Further emphasizing the importance of understanding children's perspectives, Uysal Bayrak and colleagues' (2020) research focused

on assessing the awareness of children's rights among preschool-aged children, specifically targeting those between the ages of 4 and 6. The study revealed that many children who participated expressed their awareness of the right to play. Additionally, the study's findings shed light on the absence of any child mentioning the right to participate.

The studies looking at children's perspectives on their rights show the significance of the right to play (Uysal Bayrak & Ors 2020; Tunc & Pamuk 2023) and the limited emphasis on participation rights among children (Ersoy 2011; Uysal Bayrak & Ors 2020). However, in Tunc and Pamuk's (2023) study, some children were able to merge the right to participate with the right to play as playing is a type of participation. Considering the findings that highlight the right to play and the limited emphasis on the right to participation amongst children studied, the curriculum can potentially integrate both aspects. While the right to play is evidently fundamental and resonates strongly with children, there may be an opportunity to enhance awareness and understanding of participation rights.

Moreover, Ersoy's (2011) study indicated that only children from higher socio-economic backgrounds demonstrated an explicit understanding of the importance of participation rights. The disparity between children from low and higher socio-economic backgrounds in awareness of participation rights can show the crucial role of incorporating participation rights explicitly within the curriculum. Recognizing this disparity is important for achieving social justice in education, as it ensures that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, are equally informed about and empowered to exercise their participation rights. While studies explored in this literature review involved certain rights that children are aware of, such as the rights to play and participation, the absence of children's knowledge of other fundamental rights, including the rights to protection, healthcare, shelter, adequate nutrition and many others (UNCRC: ie Articles 16, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 31, 32, 38, and 39) highlight the necessity to comprehensively integrate all these rights within the curriculum.

Recognizing how important it is for young people to know about their fundamental rights, an exploration of diverse teaching methods becomes key to understanding how the foundational principles of children's rights can be conveyed and cultivated. According to UNICEF (2021), some early child development experts suggest that children aged 3 to 6 may encounter challenges comprehending abstract concepts tied to rights, like "rights-holder", while others argue that, even at this age, it is feasible

to begin establishing the groundwork for comprehending concepts related to child rights with age-appropriate teaching methods. In this sense, it may be important to start from the concrete and move to the abstract. For instance, teachers can “start with concrete examples relevant to young children’s everyday lives (e.g. names, birthdays, family situation, food, safety, privacy – such as going to the toilet)” (UNICEF 2021: 12). Moreover, “education must be provided in a way that is consistent with human rights, including equal respect for every child, opportunities for meaningful participation, freedom from all forms of violence and respect for language, culture and religion” (UNICEF & UNESCO 2007: 4). By using appropriate teaching strategies, educators can help young children develop a meaningful and practical understanding of their rights from an early age.

In terms of the teaching strategies, Dere (2022) explored the experiences of preschool teachers in relation to teaching children’s rights. Dere’s study established that, regarding teaching methods, preschool teachers emphasized using visual aids (such as pictures, slides, and videos), games, theatre, and drama to teach young children their rights. Also, Brantefors and Thelander (2017) highlighted four concepts when teaching young children their rights: participation, empowerment, rights awareness, and rights respecting. Moreover, Tellgren’s (2019) study, conducted in two preschools in Sweden, revealed that the teaching of children’s rights adopted an approach with less direct instruction and greater emphasis on understanding, skills, and practical action. This indirect learning process aimed to prioritize human relations and interactions, particularly from the children’s perspectives on their cultures. Additionally, Tellgren (2019) found that both preschools prioritized linguistic skill development, recognizing it as a crucial aspect of teaching children about their rights, with a focus on empowering every child to effectively express themselves.

In summary, the literature review has explored the intricate relationship between rights education, children’s perspectives on their rights, and the methods for integrating children’s rights into the learning environment. Building on these perspectives, the literature highlighted the need for a comprehensive integration of various fundamental rights within the curriculum and involving various activities in the learning environment. The following section will detail the analytical approach used to examine the Turkish ECE curriculum and Activity Book, aiming to contribute to the effective integration of children’s rights education in ECE.

[C] METHODOLOGY

In Türkiye, the UNCRC was signed in 1990 and ratified in 1994. This pivotal international treaty sets forth the fundamental rights of and protection for every child, emphasizing their entitlement to live and learn in an environment that nurtures their development per their age and maturity. Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC specifically outline the obligation of state parties to establish an educational framework aligned with children's rights. The primary goal is to equip children with life skills, enhance their capacity to exercise their rights, foster a culture imbued with human rights values, and fortify the child's learning capacities, abilities, self-esteem, and self-confidence.

As qualitative research, our project was designed as a case study using the content analysis methodology. In qualitative research, the unit subject of analysis can be an individual, an institution, a programme, or a school (Yildirim & Simsek 2011), or decision and decision-making processes, certain implementation processes, or organizational change issues (Yin 2003). Considering that, our research was conducted as a case study since it aimed to examine in the context of the UNCRC the official ECE curriculum which is in effect in every school in Türkiye because of the centralized education approach employed in the country. For this reason, the most recent ECE curriculum² (MoNE 2013a) and the ECE Activity Book (MoNE 2013b), which have been in force during the period 2013-2024, were analysed using the content analysis method. Content analysis has an important place among the available methods of collecting information and has several positive aspects, such as the absence of reactivity, the ability to handle large samples and its low cost (Yildirim & Simsek 2011).

Our analysis extends beyond a mere quantitative assessment of the presence of children's rights-related content; rather, we delve into the qualitative aspects, scrutinizing the depth and context in which these principles are introduced. As outlined by Mayring (2004), this systematic and in-depth approach allows us to dissect the textual content of both the ECE programme and the Activity Book, examining every line with a focus on the representation of children's rights themes. Our goal was to generate meaningful codes that capture the essence of how children's rights concepts are presented within the ECE curriculum in Türkiye.

² Full Access to the [MoNE ECE curriculum](#), in force between 2013-2024, is available from the official website.

To enhance the rigour of our analysis, we categorized the codes based on common themes and objectives derived from the UNCRC. This process enabled us to identify recurring patterns, thematic concentrations, and potential gaps in the representation of children's rights within the educational materials. The categorization of codes into overarching themes provided a structured framework for our interpretation and facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced ways in which rights education is integrated into early childhood curricula in Türkiye.

Selecting the most current curriculum is paramount in ensuring that the educational content remains relevant, reflective of evolving societal norms, and aligned with the latest educational paradigms. In this context, it is noteworthy that the MoNE plans to update its ECE curriculum in 2024. However, this study is confined to the examination of the 2013 curriculum, which has been actively used in schools ever since then, offering a snapshot of the educational landscape as it existed during that time. The decision to focus on this particular curriculum allows us to discern the progression and evolution of children's rights representation in ECE, thus providing a reference point for future comparative analyses. By understanding the nuances of the 2013 curriculum, we can pave the way for informed recommendations and adjustments in subsequent educational frameworks, contributing to the continual enhancement of ECE in Türkiye. In conclusion, through this comprehensive analysis, we aspire to contribute valuable insights that can inform future revisions of educational materials, ultimately fostering a more robust and effective integration of children's rights principles in ECE.

[D] RESULTS

The ECE curriculum in Türkiye and its association with children's rights derived from the UNCRC

In the ECE curriculum examined in this study, various components are highlighted, including the significance of the preschool period, developmental characteristics, learning objectives, planning, and the implementation and evaluation of preschool education. As outlined in the curriculum, its fundamental features are characterized by

being child-centred, flexible, and having a spiral structure. It embraces an eclectic, balanced, and play-based approach, with an emphasis on discovery-based learning that prioritises the development of creativity. The curriculum encourages the use of daily life experiences and local resources for educational purposes, treating themes/topics as tools rather than ends. While learning centres are deemed crucial,

family education and participation are considered vital elements. The curriculum takes into account both cultural and universal values. The evaluation process is multidimensional, and explicit attention is given to adaptations for children with special needs. Guidance services are also underscored (MoNE 2013b: 14).

All these statements reflect the assumptions of policymakers that these principles effectively guide the curriculum.

Concerning the content of the programme designed for children aged 36-72 months, specific developmental characteristics are thoroughly outlined, encompassing cognitive, language, social-emotional, and movement-oriented development, as well as self-care skills. These specifications are further detailed for age groups of 36-48 months, 48-60 months, and 60-72 months. Upon closer examination of the learning achievements, indicators, and explanations provided in the programme, the following findings emerged.

None of the 21 learning achievements³ related to cognitive development, or the 12 learning achievements⁴ related to language development, or the five learning achievements⁵ related to movement-oriented development are directly associated with children's rights. Conversely, out of the total 17 learning achievements⁶ in social and emotional development, nine

³ (1) Pays attention to objects/situations/events; (2) makes predictions related to objects/situations/events; (3) remembers what is perceived; (4) counts objects; (5) observes objects or entities; (6) matches objects or entities based on their properties; (7) groups objects or entities based on their properties; (8) compares the properties of objects or entities; (9) arranges objects or entities based on their properties; (10) applies spatial instructions related to location; (11) measures objects; (12) recognizes geometric shapes; (13) recognizes symbols used in daily life; (14) creates patterns with objects; (15) understands the part--whole relationship; (16) performs simple addition and subtraction operations using objects; (17) establishes cause-and-effect relationships; (18) explains concepts related to time; (19) generates solutions to problem situations; (20) prepares graphs with objects/symbols; (21) recognizes Atatürk and explains his importance to Turkish society.

⁴ (1) Distinguishes between sounds; (2) uses voice appropriately; (3) constructs sentences according to syntax rules; (4) utilizes grammatical structures while speaking; (5) uses language for communicative purposes; (6) expands vocabulary; (7) understands the meaning of what is heard/seen; (8) expresses what is heard/seen in various ways; (9) demonstrates phonetic awareness; (10) reads visual materials; (11) demonstrates reading awareness; (12) demonstrates writing awareness.

⁵ (1) Performs displacement movements; (2) executes balance movements; (3) performs movements requiring object control; (4) performs movements requiring fine motor skills; (5) moves in response to music and rhythm.

⁶ (1) Introduces personal characteristics; (2) introduces family-related characteristics; (3) expresses oneself in creative ways; (4) describes the feelings of others regarding an event or situation; (5) expresses positive/negative feelings about an event or situation in appropriate ways; (6) protects one's own rights and the rights of others; (7) motivates oneself to accomplish a task or duty; (8) shows respect for differences; (9) explains different cultural characteristics; (10) fulfils responsibilities; (11) takes responsibility in activities related to Atatürk; (12) adapts to rules in different environments; (13) preserves aesthetic values; (14) recognizes the value of artistic works; (15) has self-confidence; (16) explains the different roles and responsibilities of individuals in social life; (17) solves problems with others.

are directly linked to children's rights. When we examined the learning achievements associated with children's rights in social and emotional development, we discovered that they reflect the protection of individual rights related to the principles of children's rights (UNCRC 1989), particularly the right to non-discrimination (Article 2), the freedom to express one's thoughts (Article 13), the freedom to practice one's culture (Article 30), and the right to participation in cultural and creative activities as well as engagement in play (Article 31).

The above-mentioned nine learning achievements in the social and emotional development domain specifically refer to respecting differences, understanding and appreciating diverse cultural characteristics, fulfilling responsibilities, adapting to rules, building self-confidence, and understanding societal roles and responsibilities. Respecting differences is fundamental to the right to non-discrimination and promotes the principles of equality and diversity inherent in children's rights. Understanding and appreciating diverse cultural characteristics contributes to the right to participate in cultural life, as well as to protect adequate standards of living (Article 27). Fulfilling responsibilities is connected to the idea of civic duty, contributing to the development and exercise of rights within a community (Article 29). Adapting to rules reflects an understanding of the importance of the rule of law, a fundamental principle underpinning many children's rights. Building self-confidence is essential for the realization of one's potential, contributing to personal development and dignity (Articles 23, 28, 37, 39, and 40). And, finally, understanding societal roles and responsibilities is linked to the right to participate in the cultural, social, and political life of the community, but also aligns with the overarching goal of education (Articles 27, 28, and 29).

Similarly, all eight learning achievements⁷ related to the development of self-care skills are associated with children's rights enshrined in the UNCRC.

Upon reviewing the development of self-care skills learning achievements associated with children's rights, we found that they coincide with promoting and protecting individual rights in accordance with children's rights principles. Specifically, respecting one's own body through cleanliness is a fundamental aspect of the right to health and wellbeing (Article 24). The ability to dress oneself is linked to the right to

⁷ (1) Applies cleanliness rules related to the body; (2) manages tasks related to dressing; (3) makes necessary adjustments in living spaces; (4) eats sufficiently and maintains a balanced diet; (5) explains the importance of rest; (6) uses tools and materials necessary for daily life skills; (7) protects oneself from dangers and accidents; (8) takes precautions related to health.

personal autonomy and dignity. Ensuring appropriate living conditions, as well as access to sufficient and nutritious food, is a fundamental human right, contributing to the right to an adequate standard of living adequate for health and wellbeing (Article 27 UNCRC). Understanding and advocating for the importance of rest aligns with the right to rest and leisure (Article 31), while access to tools and materials for daily life skills is integral to the right to education (Articles 24, 28, and 29) and the right to participate in cultural life (Articles 29, 30, and 31). Taking precautions to prevent harm reflects the right to life and the right to security of a person (Article 6). Finally, taking precautions in respect of one's health is a proactive approach to safeguarding one's right to health and wellbeing (Articles 23, 24, and 25). Based on the outcomes of the content analysis of the 116 activities outlined in the Activity Book concerning their alignment with children's rights, the activities predominantly emphasize the child's capacity to articulate diverse cultural characteristics and fulfil their responsibilities (Articles 29, 30, and 31).

ECE Activity Book in Türkiye and its association with children's rights

Out of the 116 activities featured in the Activity Book, 43 activities were identified as being linked to the development of self-care skills. In these activities, particular emphasis was placed on the child's ability to take health-related precautions and make necessary arrangements in living spaces (Article 27 UNCRC).

One example is the “*Ebe Tura 1, 2, 3*” game⁸ from the MoNE's official Activity Book. In this case, the “*Ebe Tura 1, 2, 3*” activity was analysed in the context of the ECE curriculum's social and emotional development goal to appreciate different cultural characteristics. Despite the curriculum's emphasis on cultural understanding (Articles 29 and 30 UNCRC), its

⁸ The following text summarises the “*Ebe Tura 1, 2, 3*” game in the Activity Book. The learning process begins by informing the children that they will play a game called “*Ebe Tura 1, 2, 3*”. It is highlighted that this game is played in various forms in many countries around the world and is also one of the traditional children's games in our country. A discussion follows about the names of the games they play and how they choose the “it” (*ebe*) in those games, noting that different counting rhymes are often used for this purpose, such as the Turkish rhyme: “*Çık çıkalım çayıra, Yem verelim ördeğe, Ördek yemini yemeden, Ciyak miyak demeden, Hakkudu hukkuđu, Çıktım çıkardım, Ki-mi çı-kar-dım.*” The rules of the game are then explained. The child chosen as “it” (*ebe*) faces the wall, while the other children line up about 3-4 metres away. With their back to the others, the “it” says, “*Ebe Tura 1-2-3*”. During this time, the other children step forward, trying to get closer to the “it”. When the phrase ends, they must freeze like statues. If the “it” sees any child moving when they turn around, that child is out of the game and becomes a spectator. The “it” then repeats the phrase and the process continues. Each time, the children get closer to the “it”. When one child touches the back of the “it”, everyone runs away, and the “it” tries to catch someone. The person caught then becomes the next “it”.

practical implementation raises efficacy concerns. Goal 9 of the Social and Emotional Development section stresses the need to explain diverse cultural characteristics. However, this traditional game serves only as an introduction to a specific cultural group, compromising the curriculum's objective of highlighting broader cultural diversity. The theoretical underpinning links the activity to the promotion of cultural rights as part of children's rights principles. While theoretically aligned, practical implementation falls short of fostering comprehensive appreciation for diverse cultures, undermining the broader human rights agenda. In conclusion, the "*Ebe Tura* 1, 2, 3" activity, while conceptually linked to the curriculum's goal, raises concerns about practical efficacy and may perpetuate cultural homogeneity. A reconsideration of the activity's design is warranted for a more inclusive and holistic approach within the ECE curriculum.

[E] DISCUSSION

The findings from the content analysis of the ECE curriculum and the associated Activity Book, which are mandatory in every school in Türkiye, have revealed both promising aspects and areas that require attention. In alignment with Tellgren's (2019) study, the Turkish ECE curriculum seems to highlight a child-centred approach, accentuating components like the significance of the preschool period, developmental characteristics, learning objectives, planning, and the implementation of preschool education. Despite this, further analysis is needed to determine whether the child-centred approach is predominantly theoretical or effectively implemented in practice.

In general, the analysis revealed that not all children's rights principles and concepts were included in the curriculum and the Activity Book. Those that were integrated were mostly presented in an implicit manner. As discussed in the results section, some included rights are non-discrimination (Article 2), freedom of expression (Article 13), freedom of cultural practice (Article 30), and the right to play (Article 31), with a particular emphasis on cultural practice. However, the curriculum and the Activity Book did not adequately cover all children's rights, particularly the rights to healthcare, shelter, adequate nutrition, and protection from violence (Article 19 and 24).

Also, the analysis revealed that there is a lack of integration of children's rights principles in the language, movement-oriented, and cognitive development domains of the ECE curriculum. None of the 12 learning achievements related to language development are directly

associated with children's rights within the curriculum. However, effective communication is central to children's rights principles and education (Tellgren 2019). By integrating these concepts into language development within the curriculum, children can begin to understand and articulate their rights and responsibilities (Articles 10, 13, 14, 15, and 40 UNCRC). In relation to this, literature suggests that it is feasible to establish a foundational understanding of children's rights concepts in early childhood (Quennerstedt 2016; Yoruk & Kaya 2019; UNICEF 2021). Therefore, the curriculum's emphasis on language development presents an opportunity for children to learn and effectively communicate the concepts tied to rights.

Similarly to language development, the Movement-Oriented Development section, despite its importance in fostering physical wellbeing (Articles 25, 27, and 29 UNCRC), did not explicitly connect with children's rights. Given the relevance of physical activity and wellbeing to children's rights, there is potential to enhance this aspect of the curriculum by incorporating movement-oriented activities that emphasize concepts such as the right to a healthy lifestyle and the right to play. The right to play is highlighted in the literature as a right that young children can comprehend (Uysal Bayrak & Ors 2020; Tunc & Pamuk 2023). Also, the literature shows a limited understanding of some fundamental human rights amongst young children, such as the right to participation (Ersoy 2011; Uysal Bayrak & Ors 2020; Tunc & Pamuk 2023), which could be implemented in the Movement-Oriented Development section. However, this study's findings suggest that none of the current five learning achievements related to movement-oriented development are directly associated with children's rights, and, therefore, it would seem opportune for the rights to play and participation to be implemented within the curriculum under this section.

The Social and Emotional Development section emerged as a significant domain where the curriculum aligns with children's rights. The learning achievements related to personal characteristics, family-related characteristics, and protection of rights demonstrate a connection to the principles of equality, dignity, and respect (Articles 23, 28, 37, 39, and 40 UNCRC). The curriculum integrates, although implicitly, children's rights by encouraging positive expression of feelings, respecting differences, and instilling a sense of responsibility towards one's own rights and the rights of others (Articles 10, 13, 14, 15, and 40). The implicit inclusion of children's rights and principles in this developmental section encompasses the right to non-discrimination, the freedom to share thoughts (Article 14), the freedoms to practise one's culture and to participate in cultural

and creative activities (Articles 29, 30, and 31). However, there is an absence of other UNCRC children's rights-related concepts such as the rights to healthcare, shelter, adequate nutrition, and many more. This underscores the necessity to integrate all these rights comprehensively and explicitly within the ECE curriculum in Türkiye.

The Activity Book (MoNE 2013a), which primarily focuses on fostering cultural understanding and self-confidence, could be improved by adopting a more comprehensive approach to teaching young children about their rights. Teachers could enhance the learning experience by utilizing alternative teaching methods, such as visual aids and age-appropriate games, rather than relying solely on traditional teaching approaches (Dere 2022). Therefore, it would be beneficial for the children's rights-related activities in the ECE activity book to include richer content enhanced by these alternative teaching methods.

The findings underscore the importance of a comprehensive approach to children's rights education in the ECE curriculum, ensuring that all aspects of a child's development are imbued with principles of equality, freedom, and dignity. The recommendations stemming from this research aim to contribute to the continual improvement of the ECE curriculum, fostering a generation of individuals who are not only academically proficient but also socially conscious and rights-oriented from their earliest educational experiences.

[F] CONCLUSION

From this study, we can conclude that children's rights are indirectly addressed in the ECE curriculum and Activity Book in Türkiye, particularly within the framework of developing the skills to recognize different cultures. This research proposes a clearer and more distinct approach to children's rights in the curriculum and Activity Book, tailored to the age of the children. It suggests emphasizing all the fundamental children's rights, such as the rights to life, protection, participation, and education, across all curricular development domains, with careful consideration of the child's best interests.

About the authors

Nejla Tugcem Sahin Bayik is an Education Specialist in the Monitoring and Evaluation Department of the Directorate of Basic Education at the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in Türkiye. She earned her PhD in Education from the University of Aberdeen and holds an MA Degree in Mathematics Education from University College London. Having lectured

at the University of Aberdeen, she has also contributed to various research projects as a researcher in the UK. Her main research interests are social justice issues in education, inclusion, diversity, and children's rights.

Email: nejlatugcem.sahinbayik@meb.gov.tr.

Ceyda Durmus received her doctorate in Social Psychology, Developmental Psychology, and Educational Research on the PhD Programme at Sapienza University of Rome in Italy. Since 2020, she has been working at the MoNE in Türkiye as an education specialist and, while working at the Ministry, she has taught several undergraduate-level courses at TED University and the Middle East Technical University as an adjunct professor at the Department of Early Childhood Education. Her main research interests concern educational inequalities and the education-migration nexus, especially analysed through qualitative research.

Email: csensin@metu.edu.tr.

References

- Bandura, Albert. "Social Foundations of Thought and Action." In *The Health Psychology Reader*, edited by Albert Bandura, 94-106. London: Sage Publications, 2002.
- Bloom, Benjamin S. *Human Characteristics and School Learning*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.
- Brantefors, Lotta & Nina Thelander. "Teaching and Learning Traditions in Children's Human Rights: Curriculum Emphases in Theory and Practice." *International Journal of Children's Rights* 25(2) (2017): 456-471.
- Bruner, J S. "Early Social Interaction and Language Acquisition." In *Studies in Mother-Infant Interaction*, edited by H R Schaffer, 271-289. London: Academic Press, 1977.
- Correia, Nadine, Claudia Camilo, Cecilia Aguiar & Fausto Amaro. "Children's Right to Participate in Early Childhood Education Settings: A Systematic Review." *Children and Youth Services Review* 100 (2019): 76-88.
- Council of Europe. "What Is EDC/HRE?" 2015.
- Dere, Filiz. "Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerinin Çocuk Haklarıyla İlgili Deneyimleri ve Algıları [The Experiences and Perceptions of Preschool Teachers Regarding Children's Rights]." *International Journal of Social Science Research* 11(1) (2022): 1-16.

- Erikson, Erik H. "Eight Stages of Man." *Childhood and Society* (1963): 219-243.
- Ersoy, A Figen. "İlköğretim öğrencilerinin çocuk haklarına ilişkin algıları [The Perceptions of Primary School Students Regarding Children's Rights]." *İlköğretim Online* 10(1) (2011): 20-39.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality." *Se 7* (1905): 125-243.
- Hawkins, Karen. "Teaching for Social Justice, Social Responsibility and Social Inclusion: A Respectful Pedagogy for Twenty-First Century Early Childhood Education." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 22 (2014): 723-738.
- Mayring, Philipp. "Qualitative Content Analysis." *A Companion to Qualitative Research* 1(2) (2004): 159-176.
- Ministry of National Education (MoNE). "Etkinlik Kitabı – Okul Öncesi Eğitim [Activity Book – Early Childhood Education]." Ankara: 2013a.
- Ministry of National Education (MoNE). "Okul Öncesi Eğitimi Programı [Early Childhood Education Curriculum]." Ankara: 2013b.
- Piaget, Jean. *The Moral Judgment of the Child*. London: Routledge, 1965.
- Piaget, Jean. *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* volume 25. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Quennerstedt, Ann. "Young Children's Enactments of Human Rights in Early Childhood Education." *International Journal of Early Years Education* 24(1) (2016): 5-18.
- Tellgren, Britt. "Teaching About and Through Children's Human Rights in Early Childhood Education." In *Teaching Children's Human Rights in Early Childhood Education and School: Educational Aims, Content and Processes*, edited by Ann Quennerstedt & Ors, 34-53. Örebro: Örebro University, 2019.
- Topsakal, Cem & İnci Sadıkoğlu. "Okul öncesi eğitimde çocuk hakları eğitimi çalışmalarına genel bir bakış [A General Overview of the Child Rights Training Studies in Pre-School Education]." *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 3(6) (2017): 219-244.
- Tunc, Esra Nur & İrem Pamuk. "Hayat Bilgisi Dersinde Çocuk Hakları: Bir İhtiyaç Analizi Çalışması [Children's Rights in Life Science Education: A Needs Analysis Study]." *Bitlis Eren Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 12(1) (2023): 50-63.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) & United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). "A Human Rights-Based Approach to Education for All." Paris: 2007.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). "Child Rights Education Toolkit: Rooting Child Rights in Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary Schools." Geneva: 2014.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). "Child Rights Education with Children Aged 0-6 Years" Discussion Paper. New York: 2021.

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). "Day of Discussion: Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood." Geneva: 2004.

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) & United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). "Plan of Action World Programme for Human Rights". Geneva: 2006.

Uysal Bayrak, Hatice; Hatice Nur Gök, Ebru Yörük & Ebru Kaya. "Okul öncesi dönemdeki çocukların gözünden çocuk hakları [Children's Rights through the Perspectives of Preschoolers]." *Uluslararası Erken Çocukluk Eğitimi Çalışmaları Dergisi* 4(2) (2020): 63-73.

Vygotsky, L. "Play and its Role in the Mental Development of the Child." *Play: Its Role in Development and Evolution* (1976): 863-895.

Yildirim, Ali & Hasan Şimşek. "Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri [Qualitative Research Methods in Social Sciences]." *Seçkin Yayıncılık, Ankara* 446 (2011).

Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* volume 5. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, 2009.

Legislation, Regulations and Rules

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948